

The Culture of Business - In Perspective

Going Back to the Basics.

By: Stephen G. Wright

My articles are formulated within the context of current trends in international relationship management and cross-cultural theories. This is mentioned due to a suggestion made in my last article. The expatriate community needs to realize that my support for a program of Cultural Due Diligence is not simply an idea but is founded in practices, theories and research done by many practitioners better known than I.

To that end I should like to help you do the homework, as I suggested before. Here are some suggested readings that will assist you to see how you can make an impact on the lives of people here without creating a negative backlash (some may suggest it is too late for that, but I say why not try). Items #7 & #8 will give you the down and dirty, short, abbreviated version that a number of you tend to place such a high value on. A word of caution – certain themes are consistent and rephrased through the readings. One theme is in the identification and valuation of diversity. My caution is based upon my professional experience and current research. Diversity moves you in the wrong direction and is not the right concept for the task you are faced with.

- 1) Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, November 2000. Building Cross-Cultural Competence: How to Create Wealth from Conflicting Values, Yale University Press
- 2) Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998. Riding the Waves of Culture, Understanding Diversity in Global Business. McGraw Hill, New York.
- 3) Adler, N. J. 1991. International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior. Kent Publishing, Boston
- 4) Bartlett & Goshal 1991. Managing Across Borders: The Transnational Solution. Harvard Business School Press: Massachusetts
- 5) <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~culture/publications.htm>
- 6) <http://www.tcm.com/trdev/weech1.htm>
- 7) http://business.baylor.edu/Phil_VanAuken//incul.htm
- 8) <http://www.businessweek.com/adsections/diversity/diversecompet.htm>

What I am amazed at is the number of people getting rich by publishing books and articles on cross-cultural competence; yet I am living day to day in environments where all these publications seem not to have been placed into practice. Then again, I may be the one “out of the loop”.

Do not be afraid to stand up and prove I am misinformed – I welcome constructive criticism. Show myself and your colleagues, with specific and verifiable examples, of how your organization is putting into operation the base concepts of organizational behavior and cross-cultural theory, as described by the numerous authors on the subject. Illustrate for the readers of KM how your use of advice from the experts in cross-cultural relations is successfully creating a positive impact, across a broad spectrum of the Kazakhstan populace (a.k.a. your stakeholders!). What I am asking

for is what I keep hearing others boast they are doing – sharing knowledge of best practices in order to better support all businesses within the global environment. Nice idea, so share the wealth! You must have forgotten about transparency.

My position as to what IS taking place is an application of the concept of “selective recall”. People remember what they want to remember. Any of us are prone to fall victim to this, it is a human problem. All of your previous training and education can not be utilized at the same time. Therefore you will use and apply those elements of knowledge that best suit your experience, perceptions and preferences and the priorities set by your environment. You may have read any of the articles or books I’ve mentioned above but you may not have seen – in daily practice – the potential for the application of the material. There are two basic reasons for this:

- 1) The business environment tends to place a higher value on quantifiable and “bottom line” oriented practices that will have a tangible return on investment. (i.e. financial management, cost accounting, logistics management) Social sciences do not play as critical a role as they can. While I am obviously biased, I suggest that human behaviors affect your business profitability to a dramatic degree. The literature supports this contention.
- 2) There is a broadly held perception that this topic need not be a priority as it is common sense; you achieve it by doing it. As one particularly bright light from the Peace Corps office in Washington once stated to me. They (volunteers) do not need pre-departure training for Russia because they learn it on the ground! Applying cross-cultural competence takes time, patience and effort. It requires a willingness to understand that it is not simply experiential. I have said to all of my students and seminar participants: “Once a cross-cultural mistake is made you can not take it back!” By this I am trying to illustrate that you have created a negative first impression. This impression forms the basis of judgment upon which your business and social interaction will be framed. The work you will have to do to overcome the cultural error and then establish a locally defined relationship is exponentially greater than if you were more culturally sensitive from the start.

Mr. Wright has 12 years of field experience in 5 nations of the F.S.U. Some of his clients for seminars in cross-cultural relations, business communication strategies and “Understanding the U.S. Culture for Strategic Advantage” include, Gazprom, The Ministry of Transportation and Defense of Saudi Arabia, Bechtel, USDA Graduate School, and Georgetown University. Between 1996 and 2002 Mr. Wright was a member of the Associate Faculty in the MBA Program at Johns Hopkins University, School of Professional Studies in Business and Education. In the 1979 Mr. Wright received his undergraduate degree in Political Science from The American University and in 1990 he completed graduate studies in Management at Cambridge College. He is now doing research for a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of South Australia.

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